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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NEW DELHI 004200

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PREL PTER MOPS IN PK INDO PAK

SUBJECT: GOI CAUTIOUS ON SEPARATIST VISIT TO PAKISTAN,  
UPBEAT ON SIACHEN

REF: NEW DELHI 3969

Classified By: A/DCM Geoff Pyatt, for Reasons 1.4 (B, D)

¶1. (C) Summary: During a June 3 farewell call that GOI Kashmir Interlocutor NN Vohra requested with soon-to-depart D/Polcouns, the senior official focused on two unprecedented events: the ground-breaking visit of what he termed "so-called moderate separatists" to Pakistani Kashmir and Pakistan proper, and the planned June 12, first-ever visit of an Indian PM to the Siachen Glacier. Vohra worried that jihadis might assassinate a prominent separatist to demonstrate their opposition to the landmark visit by All-Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) moderates across the LOC, the Srinagar-Muzaffarabad bus, and other Kashmiri-focused people-to-people CBMs. This could have a major dampening effect on improving Indo-Pak relations. Vohra also confirmed that the GOI was playing down recent high infiltration figures to preserve domestic support for rapprochement with Pakistan. Vohra said he had been asked to cut short his planned month-long vacation to meet with the PM upon the latter's return from Siachen. We remain cautious about any major Indian concessions on Siachen, but the PM's visit to the glacier could foreshadow a move by New Delhi to break the deadlock. End Summary.

Pakistan Trip May Cause Terrorism Spike

¶2. (C) Commenting on the June 2 travel by moderate All-Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) and other Kashmiri separatist leaders across the LOC, Vohra cautioned that their visit to Pakistan could prompt further terrorist attacks in J&K, starting possibly after they return to J&K. Citing Indian intelligence reports that terrorist communications and infiltration -- particularly commanders crossing into J&K -- had increased during May, Vohra worried about a spectacular attack, possibly an assassination attempt against a moderate leader such as Mirwaiz Umar Farooq. This would be intended to express opposition to the separatists' travel across the LOC and their support for Kashmiri-focused people-to-people CBMs, including the Srinagar-Muzaffarabad bus. Vohra's chief aide, Umang Narula, added that the Lashkar-e-Tayyiba front "Save Kashmir Movement" had recently threatened the Mirwaiz publicly. Vohra agreed with D/PolCouns' observation that the GOI was playing down these indicators to preserve domestic support for rapprochement with Pakistan.

PM Visit May Herald Siachen Shift

¶3. (C) Turning to Siachen, Vohra agreed with D/Polcouns and Indian strategists (Reftel) that demilitarization of the glacier could be a relatively easy deliverable out of the Composite Dialogue. Vohra recalled that in 1992, when he led the Indian delegation as Defense Secretary, the two sides were "inches away" from signing an agreement on Siachen. Vohra said that he had been asked to cut short his vacation to meet with the PM upon the latter's return from his planned Siachen tour. Vohra offered that making the journey (by two-seater light helicopter) would give the PM additional political muscle to shift the Indian position on requiring the verification of the Actual Ground Position Line, or to propose any unilateral moves there, should he choose to do so. The environmental degradation caused by prolonged stationing troops on the glacier and the non-combat hazards they face on a daily basis were further arguments for a speedy agreement, Vohra stated. However, he did not promise any new GOI initiatives to follow up what appears to have been a fairly sterile round of talks in Islamabad.

Other Issues

¶4. (C) Recapping the past few years of Kashmir-oriented highlights, Vohra also offered comments on:

-- the 2002 (and subsequent) J&K elections were a watershed: "Despite low turnout in some areas, they were credible and a good start" in restoring the political process after the bitter decade of the 1990s.

-- Musharraf's November 2004 (and subsequent) proposals for changing the political character of Kashmir: "When he talks about 'maximum autonomy,' we still don't know what he means." "Musharraf should not talk so much. He confuses people when

he changes what he says from day to day."

-- J&K Chief Minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed's view of "maximum autonomy:" This refers primarily to full control over economic and financial resources, rather than greater political and other forms of autonomy some scholars have proposed as a possible means to address Kashmiri aspirations.

-- his long-term perspectives on Kashmir and Indo-Pak relations: "Maybe, after 20 years of normalized relations, the Kashmiri people should decide their own fate." "Islamabad should decide what they want relations with India to be in 50 or 100 years, and think about how we get there."

-- dealing with hardline, pro-Pakistan separatist leader SAS Geelani: "He can only manifest his power through violence."

Comment

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15. (C) We have found Vohra to be an open, friendly, well-informed, and communicative interlocutor on one of New Delhi's most sensitive subjects. Although his position lacks the clout of other senior government appointees on security, and most Kashmiri separatists refuse to meet with him, he has survived for more than two years in two governments, evidence that he obviously enjoys the confidence of the senior GOI leadership of both Congress and the opposition BJP. Unlike the present Home Ministry leadership, Vohra is willing to think outside the box (to use the Prime Minister's phrase).

16. (C) Vohra's comments on Siachen are noteworthy, given his earlier and continuing role on this issue. While we remain cautious about any breakthrough, the fact that Manmohan Singh will be the first PM to visit the glacier could foreshadow a move by New Delhi to resolve this issue, possibly by removing New Delhi's insistence on joint verification of troop positions prior to a pull-back, or perhaps a partial, unilateral redeployment of Indian forces to break the deadlock.

BLAKE